A BRIEF HISTORY OF DRAGO MONASTERY

BY DRAGO MONASTERY
The glorious Hor Drago Ganden Rabten Nyamgæ Ling Monastery upholds the Great Lord’s (Tsongkhapa) tradition, the refined gold of the Victor’s teachings. Tibet—a great land of accomplishment completely encompassed by mountains—is the stage of our sole, destined deity, the most exalted Lotus Holder (Avalokiteśvara). It is in this deity’s realm that the flower of the snow-mountain people of Tibet fell.

When Gyalse Lhalung Palgyi Dorje was practicing and passing through the Six Ranges of Dokham: Drida Salmogang, Tsawagang, Markhamgang, Poborgang, Mardzagang, and Minyak Rabgang, following his liberation of Langdarma, he constructed the initial Hor Drago Monastery (around 920 CE). This occurred in the supreme sacred place of Ramagang, which is endowed with such excellent qualities as the four pillars and the four protectors of the land. It is located about a mile south of the center of the Drago district, a country called Trehor Dago of Dotö, which belongs to greater Tibet when Tibet is divided into Tibet and greater Tibet.

Today we can see the supreme, sacred places of Lhari Chödzong Mukpo and Dori Barsing, where Lhalung Palgyi Dorje conducted accomplishment practices for some time in the many caves where dakinis congregate. He gathered the accumulations [of merit and wisdom] through making an unthinkable amount of real and mentally emanated offerings to the buddhas and bodhisattvas of the ten directions. As a sign of this accomplishment, there is an imprint of one of his offerings in the stone at the sacred place of Ramagang, which can still be seen today.
In 1633, Dza Chöje Ngawang Puntsok, the great heart disciple of the Fifth Supreme Victor, Ngawang Lobsang Gyatso who is the crown jewel of all beings, even the gods, converted Hor Drago Monastery to the Geluk tradition. He named the monastery The Steadfast and Utter Victorious Religious Institutional Abode: A Wish-Fulfilling Jewel of the Victor’s Teaching and All-Conquering Order of the Powerful Sovereign (Ganden Rabten Namgyal Ling Chödra Gyalten Yishin Norbu Wangi Gyalpo Chokle Nampar Gyalwe De). The victorious resounding drum of this monastery’s fame came to fill the earth.

[Drago Monastery’s Artwork]

At that time, the benevolent lord Tseten Norbu, an emanation of a great bodhisattva king, was the great ruler of the land. Being a descendent of Hor Godan Khan, Tseten Norbu was a descendent of the heavenly king, lord Genghis Khan. The benevolent lord Tseten Norbu sent applications to the kings of Tibet and China (Manchu), intending to construct Drago Monastery’s principal sacred object—a Jowo Rinpoche statue of white silver and riches as a representation of the Teacher (Buddha Śākyamuni). Having invited craftsmen from Nepal and other areas, the beautifully crafted and high-quality statue was constructed for devotees to collect their merit. The Nanghola Temple, which is also named “Marvelous Temple,” was built to house this precious statue. Above its door, the temple’s name was written in three scripts: Tibetan (Tsedé Ling), Mongolian (Nanghola), and Chinese.

Namkha Gyen, an unrivaled and divinely emanated artisan, was born in the village of Tropa, Drago. When he was a young boy, he went to herd cattle but ended up falling asleep. In his dream he had a vision of the master Lake-Born Vajra (Padmasambhava), who said to him, “From now on you must paint deities, as it’ll accomplish vast benefit for beings.” The master then handed Namkha Gyen the artistic tools that he would need.

Upon awakening from his nap, Namkha Gyen recalled many imprinted memories from his previous lives, then noticed four brushes and a complete set of tools right in front of him, which he clutched immediately. Never needing to learn how to paint, he became widely known as a divinely emanated artisan, as his innate talent naturally produced divine works of art. There are many of his sacred paintings at the monastery that are endowed with refined artisanship and shimmer with blessings. Painted scrolls and frescos of the six ornaments, two supreme ones, and Sukhāvatī are some of these precious sacred works.

It is said that a master woodcarver capable of engraving a lion and snow mountain facing each other on a single grain of barley was born in a village called Dragyab in Drago. He carved many scriptural woodblocks and statues of buddhas and bodhisattvas, including the four Kadam deities, a liberating diagram, the Kuntik maṇḍala, and woodblocks of the Great Compassionate One (Avalokiteśvara). (Historical documents also record that he carved the monastery’s name above the door in Mongolian, but this has yet to be found.)

Establishing Drago Monastery’s Philosophical College
In Kardze Kushab Trungsar Lama Lobsang Puntsok’s dream, a samaya-breaking elemental spirit was on the verge of wreaking havoc by loosening an arrow at Drago Monastery. The lama thought establishing a philosophical college would be beneficial in preventing this catastrophe. When Drago’s political rulers came before him, he described his dreams in minute detail. [Upon learning about the vision], the people of Drago requested him to come and establish the philosophical college. But Lama Lobsang Puntsok replied, “In the past, the Great Fifth [Dalai Lama] ordered Amdo Jamyang Shepa to establish philosophy colleges at thirteen monasteries in Hor. So, you should invite him.”

At first, a messenger was dispatched to Ladrang Tashikhyil to invite Amdo Jamyang Shepa, and slowly about a hundred laypeople and monastics of Drago made the trip. Jamyang Shepa embarked on his journey to Drago after receiving the initial messenger. But, since it was not the right time for him to come, a fiercely powerful and massive river unlike anything seen before surged and flooded the road. They waited there for a while, but Jamyang Shepa came to realize that the timing was not quite right. So, before making his homeward journey, he sent a skilled swimmer with a letter that read, “Although this is not the right time for me to come to Drago, at some point, there will be a person named Jamyang who will establish a philosophical college at Drago Monastery.”

[Many decades later,] Jamyang Shepa’s reincarnation Jamyang Surpa who lived at Sera Keutsang Hermitage eventually came to Kham and established Drago Monastery’s philosophical college for sūtra studies in the “All-Mighty,” Fire, Female-Ox year (1817) of the fourteenth sexagenary.

AN ACCOUNT OF DRAGO MONASTERY’S SUBLIME LAMAS

Jetsun Lama Dampa Keutsang Lobsang Tenzin Yargye

On the fifteenth day of the third month of the Wood, Sheep year in the village of Kharsul, Karze, the glorious and kind Lobsang Tenzin Yargye was born to Tsetan (father) and Atso (mother). He was ordained at the age of seven by the glorious and excellent Trungsar Dorjechang Losang Puntsok Tutob Gyatso. Kushap Lodrö Puntsok came to recognize him as the reincarnation of Keutsang Lama Pönlop Jampa Mönlam. When he went to Lhasa at the age of twelve, he studied the sūtra and tantra teachings as he relied upon many spiritual masters—namely, the omniscient protector, [the Eleventh Dalai Lama] Khedrup Gyatso. He would later return to Kham and take responsibility for Drago Monastery’s teachings of scripture and realization all the while compassionately caring for his disciples.

Lobsang Tenzin Yargye authored numerous texts, including The Essence of Tantra and Sūtra: Notes Taken During the Bestowal of The Fifty Verses on the Lama and Eight Serious Downfalls and Fourteen Root Downfalls; The Harbor from which Bodhisattva Captains Board on the Ship That Traverses the Ocean of the Two Accumulations: How to Practice the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment conjointly with Mahāyāna Mind Training; Stream of Faith: A Melodious Praise to Remember the Guru’s Kindness; The Guide who Presents the Excellent Path of Great Bliss: Pith Instruction for the Yoga of
Harnessing Amitābha combined with the Practice of Transference.

In the perception of his disciples, he concluded his life by dissolving his rūpakāya while abiding in meditative equipoise within the dharmadhātu, the nature of bliss and emptiness. This sublime being’s reincarnation took birth twice in the village of Gangshab, but both ended up passing away shortly after.21

Keutsang Choktrul Rinpoche, Tubten Palden Gelek Nyamgyal

In the Water, Male-Tiger year of the fifteenth sexagenary cycle, Tubten Palden Gelek Nyamgyal was born in Shaposhi in eastern Minyak to Apo (father) and Tsering Drölma (mother).22 Sigyab the great vajra-holder prophesied and recognized him as the reincarnation of the supreme Keutsang.23

When he turned four on the sixteenth day of the eleventh month in the Wood, Snake year, Drago Monastery invited him to Sengden Hermitage Dechen Samten Ling and offered him the room called “Tashi Nyi’ö Khyilwa.” At the age of eight, he was enthroned as Drago Monastery’s throne holder. He eventually traveled to Lhasa and studied all the teachings of sūtra and tantra. Being endowed with unimaginable qualities of erudition and discipline, he became as famed as the sun throughout China and Tibet.

Dragkar Tulku Lobsang Palden Tenzin Nyendrak

Lobsang Palden Tenzin Nyendrak was born in the fifteenth sexagenary cycle. He accomplished this by bestowing the teachings of the fourth guide of this fortunate age (Buddha Śākyamuni) and the great Jamgön Lama Tsongkhapa’s teachings of scripture and realization. There are twelve volumes of his works that cover sūtra, tantra, and the general sciences. His main residence was Gethar, situated in Drago.26

Tri Rinpoche Jampa Chödrak

Tri Rinpoche Jampa Chödrak was born in the village of Walung.27 He enrolled in Drago Monastery’s religious studies institution at an early age and studied Prajñāpāramitā and valid cognition, among other topics. He traveled to central Tibet at the age of fifteen and enrolled at Drepung Monastery, where he thoroughly studied the five major subjects.28 There he earned a Geshe Lharam degree and became well known since he was the top of his class.29

He went on to enroll in the glorious Gyumé Monastery and became an erudite authority in the study of secret mantra.30 He later became the abbot of Gyumé and subsequently Jangtse Monastery’s throne holder.31 In 1920, he became Ganden Monastery’s golden-throne holder and continued to conduct marvelous and unfailing spiritual activities of the three spheres.32 After completing his role as the Ganden throne holder, he traveled to Nepal and renovated the Svayambhūnāth Stūpa and consecrated it while he presented an immense number of offerings. This, in turn, made him extremely popular.33 In the end, he passed into the dharmadhātu.

His reincarnation, Jampa Chökyi Tendar, was born in Lhasa.34 He enrolled in a monastery at
a young age and learned the Tibetan scripts and studied Buddhist scripture. He later came to Drago Monastery and was the monastery’s throne holder. He accomplished magnificent benefit for sentient beings and the teaching by heading prayer festivals.

**Tulku Lobsang Palden Tenpe Gyaltsen**

Lobsang Palden Tenpe Gyaltsen, the reincarnation of Khenpo Lobsang Wangchuk, was born in the nomadic area of Norpa, Drago. He traveled to Lhasa and enrolled in a monastery at the age of twenty, where he thoroughly and broadly studied the teachings of sūtra and tantra. Returning home, he greatly benefitted his disciples and the restoration of the teachings until he passed away at the age of sixty-one.

**Trehor Kyor Pönpo Rinpoche Tsewang Norbu**

Trehor Kyor Pönpo Rinpoche Tsewang Norbu, the renunciant lord of siddhas, was born in the village of Tropa, adjacent to the central district of Drago. Ever since he was young, he was free from the behaviors of ordinary people, possessed a strong faith in the Three Jewels, and developed renunciation, bodhicitta, and a pristine view in his heart. He enrolled in Drago Monastery, where he studied reading while he was receiving teachings. Following his time at Drago Monastery, he went to Lhasa and enrolled at Drepung Monastery, where he thoroughly studied the main scriptures. There he earned a Geshe Lharam degree and became well known since he was the top of his class. Eventually he entered the glorious Gyumé Monastery and studied the great secret-mantra tradition. In the end, he renounced all worldly matters and entrusted his three doors of body, speech, and mind to a life of isolation, while he practiced all that he had learned. Consequently, he developed clear realization, leading people to revere him as the crown jewel of all scholars and siddhas and giving him the moniker of the “Second Lord Milarepa.”

**Kushab Jampa Rinpoche**

Kushab Jampa Rinpoche’s first reincarnation was Lama Lobsang of Hor. He was the master of the twenty-five lamas of the local ruler. His residence was at Sangra Hermitage, where he practiced meditation, eventually passing away.

The second reincarnation, Geshe Gönpo Rinchen, was born in the nomadic area of Norwa, Drago. He went to Lhasa in central Tibet, where he enrolled in a monastery and received a Geshe degree. After returning to his homeland, he gave numerous teachings, empowerments, and transmissions. In the end, he upheld the lifestyle of a renunciant yogin, practicing the essence of the scriptures. This resulted in the state of his accomplishment reaching a high level.

The third reincarnation, Kushap Jampa Rinchen, was born in Tau, and Purchok Jampa Rinpoche recognized him as the reincarnation of the previous Jampa Rinpoche. He was accepted by Kushab Khentrul and went to Lhasa at the age of fifteen to join Drepung Monastery. He took the title of “Tulku of the Great Assembly” and completed the studies of five major scriptural subjects. He escaped to India in 1950 and is still alive, emanating the light of scholastic qualities.
Furthermore, like an unbroken garland of jewels, there have been numerous learned and accomplished holders of the Tripitaka. Gehse Sönam Gönpo and Geshe Yeshe Norbu are two such examples of these excellent and great beings. They are emanations merely playing the role of a human. All these excellent beings benefitted the precious Buddhist teachings and sentient beings in addition to developing Drago Monastery’s teachings that integrate the sūtra and mantra traditions. There are an unlimited number of biographies concerning these spectacular people but penning them here would be much too extensive.

**Drago Monastery’s Four Great Hermitages**

1. In the past, Sanglung Palgyi Hermitage in the Sugye valley was the abode of numerous yogins known as the “four protectors and five communities.” Take Repa Janchup Öser as an example of one of these yogins. Lobsang Tsultrim Tenpe Gyaltsen and Lamdrak Dorjechang Kalsang Namgyal were among the many others who came to live there. The hermitage holds a tradition of having twenty-five monks live at the hermitage.

2. Sungjuk Gawé Hermitage situated in Noru is the sacred place of accomplishment of Tongkor Lama Jamyang Gedun Gyatso and Amdo Lama Döndrub Miyi Senge. It maintains a tradition of having twenty-five monks live at the hermitage.

3. Sengdeng Hermitage was the seat of Pangnang Kyabgön Shalupa. Eventually Ala Geshe Yeshe Tsöndru lived there, followed by Kharsar Lama Sönam Tashi, Keutsang Lama Tenzin Yargye, and Keutsang Tubten Palden Gelek Nyamgyal, respectively. Twenty-five monks live at the hermitage.

4. Sangra Hermitage was founded by the benevolent lord Tseten Norbu for twenty-five Hor lamas to teach, practice, and study secret mantra. Geshe Gönpo Rinpoche later developed it even further. Then Khentrul Lobsang Palden Tenpe Gyaltsen and Yangtrul Jampa Tubten Rinchen lived there. There are twenty-five monks, five nuns, and around one hundred male and female lay disciples at the hermitage.

**Rasogang**

On the sacred Rasogang (Goat Feeding Hill) there is a stūpa which the Dharma king Asoka erected with his magic power. This occurred when the Dharma king constructed millions of stūpas around the world. This stūpa contains relics of Buddha Kashyapa. When Tibetan emperor Songtsen Gampo invited the Unshing Kongjo (Wencheng), a noble heiress of Tang emperor Taizong, to be his queen, she came with a divinely emanated goat hauling soil intended for the construction of the Rasa Trulrang Temple (Jokhang Temple). Since they stayed in Drago and fed the goat on that hill, the place is called Rasogang. The intelligent minister (Gar Tongtsen) and the princes constructed a temple as well as a Jowo (Buddha) statue there. This temple is said to be one of the Further Taming Temples.

**A Current Account of Drago Monastery**

During the time of the teaching’s revival [in the 1980s], Drago’s laypeople and monastics, such as Trirul Jampa Chödak Tendar, Kushab Jampa Tubten Rinchen, Tripa Geshe Ador,
Geshe Yeshe Döndrub, chant leader Jamyang, and the leader of the monks Gönpa Kyab, convened and consulted lamas and deities. As a result, on the eighth day of the tenth month in Wood, Male-Rat year, 1984, of the sixteenth sexagenary cycle, they began to prepare the foundation of Drago Monastery’s temple. This took place at the foot of the auspicious and verdant Rasogang in the mountain range of Dokham Salmogang. The scale of the temple is eighty-eight pillar measurements. The Jokhang temple is the length of forty-nine pillars measurements. The two-story mantra temple is the length of twenty-nine pillars measurements. All in all, construction was completed in 1998.

During the period of chaotic upheaval, some thoughtful monks and laypeople put their lives on the line and hid numerous, old sacred objects. These included religious paintings, such as the six ornaments and the two supreme ones painted by Namkha Gyen, and ritual instruments, such as the two types of cymbals. There are a lot of stories one could write concerning these sorts of events, but as it would be too much, I will not write them here.

The education system of the monastery provides studies in sūtra and mantra. First, for the general subjects, monks began their education at the newly founded school for Buddhist studies by learning to read and write from basic grammar textbooks beginning with The Children’s Orthography to The Guide to Signs.

Later, their instruction consists of [foundational curriculum of] The Classification of Mind, The Classification of Reasons, and The Collected Topics, after which they study the four subjects of Prajñāpāramitā. Pramāṇavārttika (Commentary on Valid Cognition) is studied during the winter term and does not have a separate class for it. Those who study the tantra tradition conduct the great approach [of the three-year retreat] and the five hundred thousand accumulations [that make one a] suitable [vessel]. Through all of this, the monastery extensively spreads the teachings of scripture and realization. Additionally, are many other cultural traditions cherished in this monastery, but they are not written here.

COLOPHON

This brief history is from Drago Monastery’s website.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


The four protectors of the land (sa’i srung bzhi) are (1) a whitish-gray tiger in the east, (2) a turquoise dragon in the south, (3) a red bird in the west, and (4) a multicolored turtle in the north.

1 hor brag ’go dgon dga’ ldan rab brtan rnam rgyal gling, BDRC G3844
2 lha lung dpal gyi rdo rje, BDRC P6986
3 ra ma sgang; The four pillars of the soil (sa’i ka bzhi) are the four mountains in the cardinal directions. According to Tibetan geomancy, if a land possesses these four mountains, this is considered to be a fortuitous sign.
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5 rdza chos rje ngyag dbang phun tshogs; ta la'i bla ma 05 ngyag dbang blo bzing rgyu mtsho, 1617–1682, BDRC P37
6 dpon drin rje tshe bstan nor bu
7 gnang ho la; ngo mthar rmad byang bkod pa'i gtsug lag khang
8 rnam mkha' rgyan; dkro pa
9 slob dpon mtsho skyes rdo rje
10 The six ornaments are Nāgārjuna, Āryadeva, Asaṅga, Dignāga, Vasubandhu, and Dharmakīrti. The two supreme ones are Śākyaprahba and Guṇaprabha.
11 The six ornaments are Nāgārjuna, Āryadeva, Asaṅga, Dignāga, Vasubandhu, and Dharmakīrti. The two supreme ones are Śākyaprahba and Guṇaprabha.
12 From the history of the monastery before Kushab Jampa Rinpoche passed away in 2013 at Drepung Monastery in southern India.
13 The Tripiṭaka, or the “three baskets,” is the threefold collection of Buddhist scriptures comprised of Sūtra, Abhidharma, and Vinaya.

highest. This degree can be equated to a Ph.D. with honors
30 rgyu smad grwa tshang, BDRC G394
31 dga' ldan byang rtse grwa tshang, BDRC G77
32 dga' ldan dgon, BDRC G337; The three spheres (khor gu) can be described in many ways as it has a plethora of applications, but here it means body, speech, and mind.
33 phags pa shing kun, BDRC G3156
34 byams pa chos kyi bstan dar
35 spur sku blo bzung dpal ldan bstan pa'i rgyal mshon; mkhan po blo bzung dbang phyug; bra'go'i nor pa
36 tre hor skor dpon tshe dbang nor bu, 1899–1967, BDRC P9616; dkro pa
37 sku zhabs byams pa rin po che; hor gyi bla ma blo bzung
38 bzung ra ri khrad
39 dge bshes mgon po rin chen; bra'go'i nor ba
40 sku zhabs byams pa thub bsten rin chen; ra'u rdzong, BDRC G2298; phur coq byams pa rin po che
41 This brief history of the monastery was written before Kushab Jampa Rinpoch passed away in 2013 at Drepung Monastery in southern India.
42 The Tripiṭaka, or the “three baskets,” is the threefold collection of Buddhist scriptures comprised of Sūtra, Abhidharma, and Vinaya.
43 bzung lung dpal gyi ri khrad; su rgyas
44 ras pa byang chub 'od zer
45 bzung tshul khrims bstan pa'i rgyal mshon; lam brag rdo rje 'chhang skal bzung rnam rgyal
46 nor 'u khang gi zung 'jag dga' bu'i ri khrad; stong skor bla ma 'jam dbang ngag 'dzun rgya mtsho; a mdo bla ma don grub mi yi seng+ge
47 spang nang skyabs mgon zha lu
48 a bla dge bshes ye shes btson 'grus; mkhar sar bla ma bsood nams bkra shis
49 bzung rwa ri khrad
50 ra gso sgang
51 chos rgyal stong bstan sgam po, 617–650, BDRC P8067; Wencheng Kongjo was possibly the daughter of Emperor Taizong's (598–649) cousin Li Daozong. For further information, see: https://treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/Wencheng-Kongjo/10811; ra sa 'phrul snang, BDRC G4261
52 mgar stong bstan, BDRC P8117
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53 yang 'dul gyi gtsug lag khang
54 khri pa dge bshe a rdor; dge bshes ye shes don 'grub; dbyung dbu mdzad grwa tshang dbu mdzad dgon pa skyabs

55 This website is currently not active due to the Chinese government's internet censorship.